

Lindsay Elizabeth Kavanagh. Social roles and young children: A content analysis of children's picture books. A Master's Paper for the M.S. in I/L.S degree. May, 2014. 32 pages. Advisor: Rebecca Vargha

This paper examines children's picture books and the characteristics of social roles presented to young children through the stories in picture books published between 1970 and 2005. Between the ages of eighteen months and three years, children begin to develop their personal identity. This is primarily through observation of prominent figures in the child's life, as well as observations through stories told to them in the oral tradition. The vast number of picture books available to parents, librarians, and teachers makes it even more daunting when working to select the proper material to present to a child.

Twenty-seven picture books were analyzed according to a coding schema to determine how they presented the characters' social role, and by extension, their gender roles. Categories for coding included traditional stereotyping of both male and female characters.

Headings:

Picture Books - Evaluation

Content Analysis - Popular Children's books

Adolescence in Literature

Evaluation – Social roles portrayed in picture books

SOCIAL ROLES AND YOUNG CHILDREN:
A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOKS

by
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INTRODUCTION

With Gutenberg's invention of the movable type printing press around 1440, mass-produced books became much more common. In England, Randolph Caldecott was instrumental in developing the first true picture books for children through his illustrations in the nineteenth century. Children's books have also served as a socializing tool to transmit these values to the next generation (Gooden et. al). Children obtain literacy skills at an early age. From the age of three months, children can begin to absorb information. From story time at the local public library to bedtime stories at night, kids are presented with images and words from the time they are old enough to focus. Eric Erickson, who created a set of psychosocial developmental stages, states that stage two, which occurs between the ages of eighteen months and three years is all about gaining a sense of control. Children will become more selective about everything from the food that they eat to the clothes that they wear. They will begin to observe more closely those around them, and they will begin to imitate adults as well as those who are older than them. Because they are learning more about themselves and are beginning to make more decisions on their own, their personal identity is being formed.

However, many of those traditional stories and books feature characters that can often fall into typical gender stereotypes. For example, although females make up fifty point eight percent of the human population (2012 census), they are represented in less than that amount in children's literature. According to Gooden, "psychologists affirm that gender stereotyping in children's books has detrimental effects on children's perception of women's roles. Therefore, illustrated children's books that view women positively can be used to eliminate these stereotypes." Gender roles are behaviors and tasks which

society associates with each gender. In the United States, men are usually expected to be stoic, decisive, direct, athletic, strong, driven, and brave. Women typically are expected to be emotional, nurturing, weak, affectionate, home-oriented and forgiving (Susan). Because children's books are often the initial method for teaching children about their standard social roles in society, these materials are incredibly influential on children. The central issue is that there are not very many quality role models in literature, especially for young girls. How are picture books portraying female characters in comparison to male characters? Besides the obvious books such as *Pinkalicious*, how are other female characters coming across? Are they girly? The titular character in Mo Willems *Edwina, the Dinosaur who Didn't Know She was Extinct* wears a pearl necklace and bakes the neighborhood kids cookies. The young boy in the story, by contrast, stomps around arguing that dinosaurs are extinct and is constantly yelling. It is subtle, but still places the characters into very traditional roles.

Authors Renae Poarch and Elizabeth Monk-Turner write in their paper "Gender Roles in Children's Literature: A Review of Non-Award Winning 'Easy-To-Read' Books" that the transmission of culture through language is a powerful tool (Greif 1980; Weitzman, Eifler, Hokada, & Ross, 1971). Nevertheless, its impact is often taken lightly when selecting books for young children to read or have read to them (Allen, Allen, & Sigler, 1993; Maher, Wade, & Moore, 1994; Peterson & Lach, 1990). Fox (1993) argues that the primary restriction preventing women from fulfilling their potential is the language barrier. She contends that gender "stereotypes in literature prevent the fullness of female human potential from being realized by depriving girls of a range of strong, alternative role models" (Fox, 1993, p. 84). Weitzman et al. (1971) also argue that role models in

children's literature not only present children with possible future images of self, but also influence their aspirations and goals. Both women and men should "be allowed to be as real in literature as they are in life" (Fox, 1993, p. 87).

Gender affects other people's expectations of children and very young children do not usually understand the expected behavior. Ya-Lun Tsao's article "Gender Issues in Young Children's Literature," examines current issues in literature targeted toward children.

"The books that children read and that are read to them have psycho-social uses at a time when children are continually constructing ideas from information around them and assimilating new knowledge with previous knowledge (Elliker, 2005). In general, children's literature is said to provide characters and events with which children can identify and through which they can consider their own actions, beliefs, and emotions (Mendoza & Reese, 2001). The characters and situations in books introduce children to what the world may look like through others' eyes, and offer opportunities for children to further construct Gender in Children's Literature... their own views of self and the world. Strictly speaking, everything that children read contributes to the formation of self-images that help to construct children's self-identity. For example, girls can imagine themselves as women and boys can imagine themselves as men (Singh, 1998). Images and specific language used in picture books have the potential to affect children's developmental processes in various ways as a result of reading at crucial stages of development (Kramer, 2001)." (Tsao)

There are several book series and authors who do try to target young women. Ruth Berman, author of "No Jo Marches" writes in her introduction,

"Jo March, Emily of New Moon, Betsy Ray, Harriet the Spy, Julia Redfern—there are many books about bookish little girls growing up to write books. The "Stories for Girls About Girls Who Write Stories" (as Perri Klass called them in her New York Times Book Review article) do not have as wide an appeal as romances, or adventures such as Nancy Drew's, but they have a deeper appeal, turning up over and over on lists of favorite books, influencing the girls who love them to read widely. Girls who like to read get encouragement from these books to go on reading and to expect that books will provide a kind of knowledge that will be valuable to them in life; and girls who find their interest in books and reading drawing them to such bookish careers as teaching, librarianship, or writing, find encouragement for such aims in the validation these books give to reading and to creative writing. (The members of the Maud Hart Lovelace Society include such Betsy fans as Judy Blume, Patricia Hampl, and Anna Quindlen; Christian McEwen, in

her anthology *Jo's Girls: Tomboy Tales of High Adventure, True Grit, and Real Life*, discusses [p. xvii] Simone de Beauvoir's and Cynthia Ozick's recollections in their memoirs of seeing themselves as future Jo Marches.)”

These titles and series are generally targeted towards older audiences, usually nine to twelve years of age. The question posed here is how accurately are books that target younger audiences (three to eight years of age) portraying social and gender roles.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many academics have argued for years about the gender stereotypes that occur in all different types of children's literature. Children are taught from a young age to adopt certain roles and behaviors as part of their socialization process. The majority of these roles are associated with a particular sex. Gender roles are the behaviors that society teaches are "correct" for boys and "correct" for girls (Shaw, 1998). Gender stereotypes are often the basis of gender roles. Shaw (1998, p. 24) added that "these are assumptions made about the characteristics of each gender, such as physical appearance, physical abilities, attitudes, interests, or occupations." Society often applies stereotypes without even realizing it. Psychologist Shaw (1998) suggested the following about developing gender roles:

Children are not passive observers. As they develop, children look for structure in their lives and are driven by an internal need to fit into this structure. They observe the world and try to develop sets of rules that they can apply to a wide variety of situations. A child's knowledge of his own gender and its implications is known as gender identity. As children acquire gender identities they also acquire stereotypical ideas about what it means to be a boy or girl. (p. 24)

For most cultures, teaching these traits is taught through story telling. Many preschools and kindergartens, even families in their homes, use picture books and story telling to not only work as early literacy training but to teach these traits (Kortenhaus and Demarest). As children are developing their sex identity, they may be learning about and adding to preconceived notions about their gender identity while reading picture books (LaDow, 1976). One of the most critical parts of the learning experiences of young

children is gender development. The actions of parents, teachers, and siblings often influence young children's perceptions of gender roles. Books are often the primary source for the presentation of societal values to the young child (Arbuthnot, 1984).

Bender and Leone (1989) argued that although children's books provide numerous hours of enjoyment, these books are also a powerful vehicle for the socialization of gender roles.

Ya-Lun Tsao authored a paper titled Gender Issues in Young Children's Literature from the Pennsylvania State University. He writes:

Besides being an important resource for developing children's language skills, children's books play a significant part in transmitting a society's culture. Without question, children develop gender-role identities during their early years, and one factor that influences this identity is the literature that children read or is read to them (Allen et al., 1993). Picture books also have a particular influence on gender identities because they are viewed at a time when children are in the process of developing their individual identities. The concern about sexism in children's literature is based on the contention that books influence children's behavior. Without question, the gender-roles portrayed in children's picture books influence their audiences, but the magnitude and generalization of this influence and its impact on behavior are not completely understood. In addition, according to Kolbe and Voie (1981), children's books are not the only influence on children's gender-role attitudes.

Many studies have been conducted on the gender roles presented in children's literature since the 1970s. Preschoolers "delight in having a favorite book to read over and over." (Kortenhaus et al.) One study found that there are typically more male characters than female characters, and that male characters are almost never featured in household activities. (Poarch and Monk-Turner) The development of preschoolers' sexual identities often occurs concurrently with their desire to repeatedly view their favorite picture books (Easley, 1973). According to Peterson and Lach (1990) "picture books offer young children a macrocosmic resource through which they can

discover worlds beyond their own life-space” (p. 189).

“Gender bias as portrayed in children's literature is still as prevalent today as in past decades, and remains a problem in light of the fact that gender stereotypes and sexism in children's picture books affect the development of gender identity in young children.” Besides being one of the most important resources for children and their developing language skills, they also work to teach children about the society that they live in. However, according to this article, researchers have found that 85% of the main characters featured in children’s books are male and that the female characters rarely do anything. (Tsao)

This stereotyping of female gender roles is depriving young girls of strong, positive role models. The male characters in these stories are depicted as strong, assertive and powerful while the female characters are passive and weak.

Another interesting note that came up in the study done by Poarch and Monk-Turner was the fact that female-authored books were as gender-stereotyped as those authored by men. There is also a decline in any type of female representation in picture books that were published in the years between 1951 and 1975. A study by Nilsen (1978) looked at 98 books that had either won the Caldecott prize or was an Honor book. The study found that in the stretch between 1971-1975, the number of female characters had shrunk to 22%. This is especially startling when you consider what was major civil rights movement was taking place at the time. Feminism was at an all time high during that time.

What is interesting is that another study conducted by Kortenhaust and Demarest suggests that Caldecott books from the 1970s showed a better balance between male and

female characters. However, the study does acknowledge that most other studies do not share this conclusion, and that most picture books are still sexist by nature. An argument was made that since the Caldecott prize is awarded to what would be considered the best of Children's literature, these books were given the prize due to their nonsexist views.

Again, though, many other studies do not share this view. The study found that:

To examine the change in the male to female ratio in children's books over the past five decades, the tabulated data for each book were grouped by decade of publication. Only non-award books were used for this analysis to avoid the problem of sampling error.

There were only five Caldecott books available for each decade and because the mean male to female ratio for the Caldecott and non-award books were fundamentally the same.

The books that were selected for this study were analyzed by the following categories: Titles, Central Roles, Pictures, and Animals.

Methodology

For this paper, the primary content analysis is based on a selection of popular children's picture books. The researcher works as a children's library and has access to a collection containing over five hundred children's books. The job includes responsibilities such as planning the weekly story times. Therefore, the researcher has some practical evidence about which books are more popular with both girls and boys. The methodology is a review and analysis of twenty-seven picture books that feature both male and female characters.

Leedy and Ormond describe content analysis as a detailed and systematic examination of the contents of a particular body of material for the purpose of identifying patterns, themes, or biases. (p. 148) The authors state that content analyses are generally used to look at forms of human interaction such as books and newspapers. With content analysis, the researcher will define the research question first, in this case, "how are picture books presenting female characters compared to male characters?"

According to Leedy and Ormond, content analysis is very systematic. Typical first steps include:

1. Identifying the specific body of material being studied. If the material is small, it is studied in its entirety. If the material is quantitative, then only a sample will be analyzed.

2. Defining the characteristics or qualities that are to be examined in clear, precise terms. Specific examples may be included.
3. Breaking down the material being analyzed into manageable sections, if necessary.
4. Scrutinizing the material for instances defined in 2.

One crucial step with content analysis is tabulating the information in an easy to understand manner. Because a content analysis is by definition counting the frequency in which characteristics occur, they are quantitative as well as qualitative. (p.149)

When one is conducting a content analysis, the following must be included in the research report.

1. A description of the material studied.
2. Precise definitions and descriptions of the characteristics looked for.
3. The coding or rating procedure.
4. Tabulations for each characteristic.
5. A description of patterns that the data reflect. (p. 149)

This study is a directed content analysis, as it relies heavily on the analysis of twenty or so picture books directed at children two years to five years of age. Latent coding will be used, as the stereotypes and gender roles will be implied rather than stated. The units of analysis will be individual books. The frequency of each characteristic examined will be taken into consideration both in each unit and generally.

The selection method for choosing the books was by examining circulation reports at the Hailey Public Library located in Hailey, Idaho. The picture book collection circulates widely, but several books stood out as more popular. The

limitations on this study are fairly broad, so there was no need to narrow the list. All of the books are written in English and were published in the United States of America. There were no limitations on what year the books were published.

The evaluation is modeled loosely on that used by Poarch and Monk-Turner (2009) but modified to fit the simpler layout of a picture book. Because the stories are short and basic, the rubric did not require many factors or characteristics. Questions such as, “is the main character a human?” factored in highly.

The limitations to this study were few. The books were all easy to access and analyze. Even with the desired age limit of two years old to five years old, many of the books appeared on Amazon targeting a larger age range. Many of the books are recommended to children up to eight years of age. Poetry books were not included and none of the books would be considered a sequel if it is part of a series (*Fancy Nancy*, *Pinkalicious*). This possibly eliminates many books that could have been part of a larger study. The types of books were limited to items cataloged as P for picture. Therefore none of the following categories were used in this content analysis; J Easy books, no Holiday books, and no bilingual books. Graphic novels and any books published in the last two years were also excluded. One limitation which was not anticipated by the researcher was that even with a considerable collection of picture books many of them were not suitable for this study. In order to observe the portrayal of gender roles in picture books, the book content had to present characters that could be analyzed. There were several books that were selected and after reading the books, the researcher discovered that the content ultimately did not fit the criteria of the study. The original

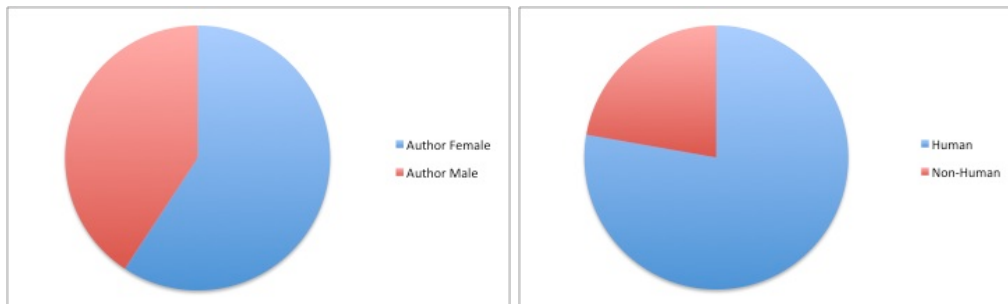
goal was to read forty books, but there was only time and resources to read twenty-seven books.

Research Question

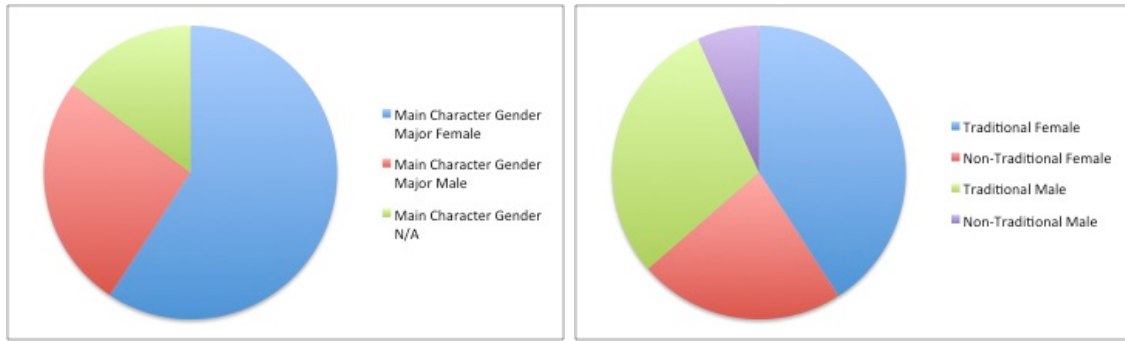
How are picture books portraying female characters in comparison to male characters?

Results

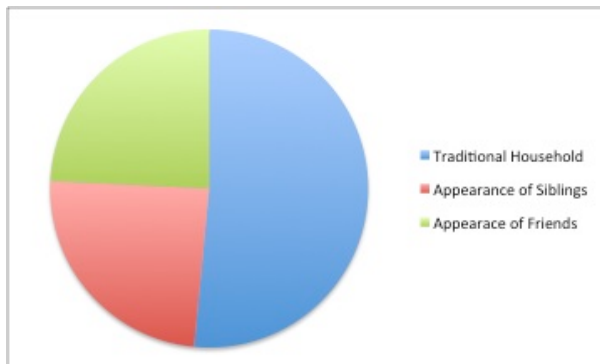
Of the twenty-seven books that were analyzed for content, women wrote sixteen of them. Men wrote the other eleven books. None of the books had won an award, and that criterion was not part of the limitations on this study. There were sixteen major female characters and seven major male characters. Twenty-one of the main characters were human beings, while six of them were non-human (frog, pig, cat, etc.)



Determining what was “traditional” versus “non-traditional” behavior with the main characters was very subjective. Occasionally with the stories, the actual text did not give anything away, and the illustrations were the only telling part of how the character behaved. The dress of the character was one of the notable factors used to determine if the character was traditional or not. If the female characters were in dresses, they received a tick for “traditional.” Only three of the female characters analyzed were shown wearing pants. Other factors, like whether they spent time inside or outside, played a part in deciding whether or not the character was traditional.



Also taken into consideration were the character's parents, if present. If they were in a role traditional to a woman or a man, they were coded that way. Only in one instance did the father figure exhibit a non-traditional role, and that was in *Knuffle Bunny*. The father took the main character and her stuffed rabbit to the Laundromat to do the laundry. Housework, such as laundry, traditionally is completed by the wife or mother, rather than the husband or father.



Other main characters were supported by less traditional characters, such as grandparents. *Butterfly House* and *Night is Coming* both show the main character (a female) with her grandfather.

Other books show parents and other family members only in the illustrations. Friends, pets, and the occasional imaginary friend can serve as secondary characters in the story. This made it even more difficult to categorize what was a traditional role, so once again; it was a very subjective decision.

Books such as *Finding Susie*, *The Art Lesson*, *Best Friends*, *My Family Vacation*, and *Butterfly House* all depicted characters in a very traditional setting. All featured human characters, supporting characters that portrayed family members, and problems and issues typical to a child. In *Finding Susie*, the main character longs for her own pet. In a slightly less traditional manner, her parents allow her to discover on her own that certain animals make better pets than others.

The Art Lesson is about a boy who wants to be an artist more than anything. He is always painting and drawing. His parents and his grandparents all display his artwork proudly. He has two grown cousins who are artists, and he wishes to be like them. When he finally gets to take an art class at school, he is dismayed to learn that his art teacher wants him to do exactly as she does. There is no room for creativity at all. The teacher eventually lets him know that he must learn the rules of art before he can bend them, the way a true artist does.

Best Friends and *My Family Vacation* are both stories about a girl. In one, a girl loses her best friend for the summer and she must learn how to be independent. The second is about a girl who goes on her first vacation with her family. Like many, she has an older brother who constantly teases her.

Some of the books, such as *Amazing Grace* and *Skippyjon Jones*, explore a more adventurous side. Grace loves to act out her favorite stories, and she auditions for a role in *Peter Pan*. When she wins the role of Peter, there is a little bit of pushback from her fellow cast members. Grace eventually realizes she must be true to herself. Skippyjon fancies himself El Skippito, a Zorro-like alter ego. Like many children, his imagination takes him places he would not be able to go otherwise.

Other books that stood out to the researcher were *Pinkalicious*, *Fancy Nancy*, and *Edwina, the Dinosaur who Didn't Know She Was Extinct*. All three of these stories feature feminine, girly characters. The Mo Willems book, *Edwina*, also featured a character that was categorized as a traditional male, as he displayed characteristics typical of an American man (assertive, direct, and brave).

Conclusion

Children's picture books are both informative and enlightening. The researcher was initially surprised that the amount of research already done on such a topic was mostly focused on juvenile and young adult fiction. After completing this study, it was clear that there were a lot of books that made it difficult to analyze the actual role of the main character. Several books told simple, pleasant stories about animals where there was really no room to analyze a gender role, as the gender was not specified.

Some of the stories stood out in particular. *Fancy Nancy*, *Pinkalicious*, and *Edwina, the Dinosaur Who Didn't Know She Was Extinct* all feature characters who are the epitome of female stereotypes. Flighty, feminine, and a homemaker type. Edwina, a dinosaur, wears a pearl necklace and bakes cookies for the neighborhood kids. When Reginald, the male character accuses her of being extinct, she shows weakness. Reginald, by comparison, is forceful and direct.

Nancy, of the *Fancy Nancy* series, only wears dresses. She enjoys tea parties and being fancy. One plus for her is that she introduces a more sophisticated vocabulary, complete with definitions to explain the meanings to the young readers.

Pinkalicious might just be the worst offender. She is portrayed as a brat who wishes only to get what she wants, in this case, pink cupcakes. When the cupcakes turn her pink, her parents have her eat vegetables to get better. She spends the majority of the book whining about the "nasty" vegetables. Initial thoughts were that this book was about greed, overindulgence, and disobeying your parents. That she is garbed in a flashy pink dress with a glittery tiara adds to the girly-girly factor.

Children are receptive to everything when they are aged eighteen months to three

years. They are learning how to walk, talk, dress, eat and interact with others. Therefore it is vital that teachers, librarians, and parents carefully select the books they use for children's recreation or learning.

Children learn to stereotype by sex role early in life. Fried (1982) claimed "before entering school, children are exposed to sex-typed models in television, movies, toys and games, child-rearing practices, and the attitudes of individuals who people children's formative years" (p. 25). Around the age five, young children will start to model the behaviors of adults, become more independent and develop their self-identity.

While this study may have proved just how vast the selection for picture books really is, it also demonstrated that with this large offering, there is even more importance to be placed on **what** kids are reading and having read to them.

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Appendix A: Evaluation Tool

Title of Book:

Author:

Copyright Date:

Publisher:

Book Characteristics:

Is the author male or female?	Male	Female
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Did the book win any awards? Which ones?

Characterization in Narrative:

Are the female characters major or minor?	Major	Minor	N/A
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Are the male characters major or minor?	Major	Minor	N/A
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Are the characters human?	Yes	No
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Gender Roles in Narrative:

Are the female characters typical (pink, sparkly)?	Yes	No	N/A
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Are the male characters typical (blue, trucks)?	Yes	No	N/A
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Are the female characters traditional (housewife)?	Yes	No	N/A
--	-----	----	-----

Are the male characters traditional (breadwinner)?	Yes	No	N/A
--	-----	----	-----

Setting & Plot:

Does the character live in a traditional household (mother, father)?	Yes	No
--	-----	----

If not, what is the setting?

Does the main character have siblings?	Yes	No	N/A
--	-----	----	-----

Does the main character have friends that are portrayed?	Yes	No	N/A
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Additional Observations:

Appendix B: Bibliography of Books

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Appendix C: List of Book Titles

Bad Kitty by Nick Bruel

Kitty is usually a very good cat. However, when her favorite food runs out and she is forced to eat things like asparagus and beets, she turns into a very bad kitty, doing things like biting grandmothers and eating homework.

Big Wolf and Little Wolf by Nadine Brun-Cosme and Olivier Tallec

Big Wolf lives alone under a tree at the top of a hill. He enjoys his solitary life until one day, Little Wolf comes to live under the tree too. Big Wolf is very discouraging, and eventually Little Wolf goes away. Big Wolf is sad and lonely without company, and is pleased when Little Wolf returns.

Butterfly House by Eve Bunting

A young girl finds a caterpillar and decides to keep it. Her grandfather helps her build a butterfly house to keep it safe. Over time, the caterpillar turns into a butterfly, and it is time to let it go. When she is an older woman, butterflies return by the thousands to her garden to thank her for her kindness long ago.

The Art Lesson by Tomie DePaola

“The Art Lesson” tells the story of Tommy, a young boy who dreams of being an artist. He spends all of his time drawing and painting, and his family hangs them up all around the house. He eagerly anticipates the day he gets to start real art lessons at school. However, on the day, he is horrified to discover that there are “rules” to art! However, his art teacher soon discovers she is working with a real talent, and they compromise, making it possible for Tommy to retain his creativity.

Red Leaf, Yellow Leaf by Lois Ehlert

This is the story of a child who planted and then became friends with a sugar maple.

Olivia by Ian Falconer

Olivia is a precocious pig who is “good at a lot of things.” Everything it seems but napping. She is feisty, unruly, and adorable.

Wemberley Worried by Kevin Henkes

“Wemberley Worried” is about a young mouse named Wemberley. She worries about everything. From dawn until dusk, Wemberley worries. When the time comes for her to go to school, she worries more than usual. At first, she is very nervous, but then she meets Jewel, a fellow worrier. She and Jewel spend the day together playing and crafting. And Wemberley stops worrying.

Toot and Puddle by Holly Hobbie

Toot and Puddle are two friends who live in the same forest together. Toot decides to go off exploring while Puddle decides to stay home. This story tells of both of their adventures.

Amazing Grace by Mary Hoffman

Grace loves stories. She also loves to act out all of her favorite parts. So when a part in Peter Pan is offered to her, she knows she wants to be Peter Pan. She is told she can’t though, because it is a boy part. She still fights to play the part.

Pinklicious by Victoria and Elizabeth Kann

“Pinkalicious” is a story about a young girl who loves the color pink. She has pink everything, including cupcakes. When her parents warn her that she could turn pink if she ate too many of them, she does so anyway. And she turns PINK!

Betty Bunny Wants Everything by Michael B. Kaplan

“Betty Bunny” wants everything, every toy in the toy store. She has to convince her parents that she can, in fact, have all of the things.

My Family Vacation by Dayal Kaur Khalsa

May is going on her first family vacation with her parents and her brother, Richie. The long road trip to Florida, she and her brother fight, as he picks on her. When they finally reach Florida, they are able to bond and enjoy the vacation.

Best Friends by Steven Kellogg

Kathy and Louise are best friends. They do everything together, and even share a fantasy horse, Silverwind. When summer comes, Louise's aunt and uncle come to take her away on vacation. Kathy spends a lot of time trying to fill her time while missing her best friend.

Chloe by Peter McCarty

Chloe is a small bunny who has ten older brothers and sisters and ten younger brothers and sisters. She loves being the middle child, until her father brings home a new television one night. She and her youngest sister Bridget decide to find their own entertainment.

Night is Coming by W. Nikola-Lisa

This is the story of a little girl who is visiting her grandpa's farm. She observes the farm animals as the night is falling.

If You Give a Mouse a Cookie by Laura Numeroff

This classic story is about a mouse who goes from wanting milk with his cookies to books to read and crayons to color with.

Finding Susie by Sandra Day O'Connor

"Finding Susie" is the story of a young girl who lives on a ranch. She longs for the most perfect pet, testing out everything from a tortoise to a young bobcat. Her parents are patient and allow her to discover on her own what animals make the best pets.

Fancy Nancy by Jane O'Connor

The first in a long series, "Fancy Nancy" tells the story of Nancy, a young girl who believes it is always better to be fancy. She uses big words and loves sparkly tiaras.

Some Birthday! By Patricia Polacco

Patricia is trying to get her family to remember that it is her birthday. She has no cake, no candles, no presents. When her dad suggests a trip to a cave, Patricia is in for a spooky birthday.

The Great Gracie Chase: Stop that Dog! by Cynthia Ryland

Gracie is a usually quiet dog who one day escapes from her home. She runs about town, causing uproar. Everyone from the painters to the grocery store clerks are trying to catch her. When she reaches the outskirts of town, she discovers it is once again quiet. And she goes home again, all on her own.

Skippyjon Jones by Judy Schachner

Skippyjon Jones is a Siamese cat who wants to be El Skippito, a Zorro-like alter-ego. This first book in the series documents his first adventure.

Good Job, Little Bear by Martin Wadell

Big Bear and Little Bear go out for a walk one day. Big Bear is teaching Little Bear the ways of the woods, and when they get to a stream, Little Bear falls in and gets wet. Big Bear has to console him.

Edwina, The Dinosaur Who Didn't Know She Was Extinct by Mo Willems

Edwina is a dinosaur who lives in town. She wears pearls, and bakes cookies, and Reginald, a young boy in town, keeps trying to convince everyone that she is in fact, extinct.

Knuffle Bunny by Mo Willems

Trixie loves Knuffle Bunny. She takes him everywhere. When she visits the Laundromat with her father, she accidentally washes Knuffle Bunny and misplaces him for a time.

Bear Wants More by Karma Wilson and Jane Chapman

Bear has just woken up from hibernation and he is hungry! His friends help him find the most delicious berries and roots to eat, but he still wants more!

Jubal's Wish by Audrey Wood

Jubal is a young bullfrog who wishes to spend a glorious spring day with his friends. Unfortunately, all of his friends are busy with other concerns and worries. Jubal only wants to help his friends, and he seeks a wizard's assistance.

How Do Dinosaurs Say Goodnight? By Jane Yolen and Mark Teague

This charming story places dinosaurs in traditional bedtime settings. It's humorous and clever.